

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Lesson 7, Chapters 2 and 3

We'll close out Acts chapter 2 and open chapter 3 today. But first as is our custom, let's quickly review our previous session.

One of the most memorable features of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell Believers on Pentecost (***Shavuot***), was that the 12 Disciples along with the 120 other Believers present began to speak in foreign languages that were unknown to them. The word used in that era to mean a language was tongue. Tongues referred only to natural human languages just as we think of them: English, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, etc. Today the Church calls this phenomenon "speaking in tongues". And there is substantial theological and denominational disagreement over whether this spiritual gift is still appropriate for our time, or if it still exists, and for some it is thought that a Believer must possess it as evidence of being saved.

Was there a reason or a precedent for this ecstatic speech event to occur at Pentecost in conjunction with the presence of the ***Ruach HaKodesh*** (the Holy Spirit)? Indeed there was. Back in Moses' day we found in Numbers 11 that when God put the Holy Spirit upon (not within) the 70 Elders that Moses had appointed to help him guide God's people through the wilderness, they all spontaneously started uttering ecstatic speech. Since it is said that some of the Spirit that was upon Moses was, by an act of God, shared with the 70 Elders, then we understand that it is the same Spirit that is being shared and not a different one or ones. So we have at Pentecost with the Messianic Believers in Jerusalem a nearly identical happening as occurred 13 centuries earlier with Moses and His Elders during the exodus from Egypt.

There was an important divine purpose for the Holy Spirit enabling these followers of Christ to speak different languages on this particular occasion: thousands of visiting religious Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire on a God-mandated annual pilgrimage. The required pilgrimage was to celebrate the Biblical Festival of **Shavuot** at the Temple, and these Diaspora Jews each spoke a language that was native to whichever country they were from. That is, most did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic, the two common languages of the Holy Land Jews including the 12 Disciples. So without this miracle of languages what the Lord was revealing through the Believers about Yeshua and the Holy Spirit could not have been understood by these many thousands of visiting foreign Jews.

We also discussed that in one of his letters to the Corinthians Paul addressed the issue of speaking in tongues head-on because it was causing dissention among the new Believers at Corinth; and that same dissention continues among Christian denominations to our day. We read passages in 1Corinthians chapters 12 and 14 to see that Paul certainly commended those who spoke in tongues. But he also nuanced it by saying that speaking in tongues was not meant to be universal among Believers because it was but one of a range of gifts and abilities that the Holy Spirit endowed the faithful with. So the exact gifting that each Believer might receive was done strictly at the sovereign choice of the Spirit. Paul concluded that speaking in tongues was not even the greatest among the Spiritual gifts. However without saying which gift was greatest or least he did say that prophesying was greater than tongues.

Then we learned that prophesying in the NT era did not usually mean to foretell the future as it did in OT times. Nor did it have the alternate OT meaning of adding to Holy Scripture. Rather in NT times prophesying meant to expound upon the existing Scriptures (the OT, the Tanakh) that was believed to be closed up, completed, with no more to be added. In modern terms, then, prophesying merely means to properly interpret the Bible and to teach it.

Let's re-read part of Acts chapter 2.

### **RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 2: 33 – end**

The first verses we read bring up the issue of the role of King David in regards to the Messiah. And in verses that come just before these passages Peter begins to explain that the Messiah would be eternal; but that King David had died, was

buried, and his tomb was just a few hundred meters from where they were standing. So it is obvious that King David wasn't the Messiah since he is not alive, and he has not bodily ascended into Heaven to sit at God's right hand. However Yeshua, who was killed, arose from the dead, and then ascended into Heaven leaving no trace of Himself behind, is a descendant of King David and **is** the Messiah. Peter admonishes his listeners that many of them were eyewitnesses to the signs and miracles of Yeshua so there should be no doubt in them. These signs and miracles fulfilled the prophecies of the several OT Prophets concerning the Messiah, even those prophecies of King David. Thus this is the proof that Yeshua of Nazareth is the Messiah, He is Lord and King, He is eternal, and He is currently in Heaven with Yehoveh, His Father. But then Peter hits them with a roundhouse right to the jaw. He says to these Jews: "Messiah is this Yeshua, whom you executed on a stake!"

Peter's eloquent argument and his accusation of responsibility to the Jews who were listening to him had its effect. Many realized their guilt and shame (especially the local Judean Jews among the crowd). What now? They bore guilt (mostly in a communal sense) for killing God's Messiah; so how could they possibly survive this unforgivable trespass? Notice their response: "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter told them to 1) turn from their sins, 2) return to God, and 3) be immersed (baptized) on the authority of Yeshua. And if they will do these 3 things they will be forgiven. Of course what Peter is talking about is the kind of repentance that is acceptable to God.

But the Jewish crowd's reaction to Peter's condemnation of them makes it clear that they inherently understood that repentance is above all else an ACTION! They asked what to **do**; not what to pray or what to think. And so Peter said they were to behaviorally turn from their sins, actively return to obeying God in their lives, and hurry to be baptized in the name of Yeshua. All of these things were tangible actions, not a change in feelings or merely a passive change of mind or heart. This idea of repentance as concrete behavioral change at all levels of our lives has been all but lost in Christianity. However don't think that this mistaken mindset that *feelings* and *words* of repentance are as good as or better than making actual life changes happens only in our day and age. Listen to this passage written by John Chrysostom around 400 A.D., taken from his work titled "Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles".

***"What shall we do?" They did what must be done, be we (do) the opposite. They condemned themselves and despaired of their salvation. This is what***

***made them such as they were. They knew what gift they had received. But how do you become like them, when you do everything in an opposite spirit? As soon as they heard, they were baptized. They did not speak cold words that we do now, nor did they contrive delays, even though they heard all the requirements. For they did not hesitate when they were commanded to “save yourselves from this generation”, but welcomed it. They showed their welcome through their action and proved it through their deeds what sort of people they were.”***

Repentance not only requires action; the substance of true repentance IS action. To say you have repented but it is not reflected in any discernable way in your life? Only God can know if He has forgiven you, but how can those around you think that whatever you piously claim is any more than “cold words”, says John Chrysostom, if they see no positive change in you? I tell you frankly that I have seen many claim repentance and Christ, but few do more than talk the talk. In the late 90's in a CNN interview, Billy Graham lamented that the follow up from his Crusades (that had made him a household word and a giant in Christendom) revealed that of all those hundreds of thousands who left their seats to come and surround the stage and pray the sinners prayer fewer than 3% showed any signs of continuing on with what they had professed. And just as a reformed alcoholic or drug addict can listen to the pleading words of a substance abuser and know whether they are sincere or their words are just emotion driven or even manipulation, so a person who at one time thought they were saved, but suddenly realized that their own actions reflect no fruit of the Spirit in their lives, no discernable outward commitment to Christ, can often recognize the same in others.

I am a good example of this. I was raised in a Christian household to model parents. I can't ever recall a time in my life that I didn't know who Jesus was. We went to Church as a family. I never heard a bad word from my mother or father, never heard them argue with one another. They were highly regarded and trusted in the community. They were kind and sweet. We were taught Godly principles and our household was quiet, safe, stable and loving. I was baptized (like so many, on a few occasions!) But in my late 30's my life was plunged into chaos and despair; and all at once, in a catastrophe that I can only visualize as like the World Trade Center collapsing all at once into a heap of dust and rubble, I instantly realized that the cause and fault of my predicament was my own. I had talked the talk with the best of them; but I had never walked the walk of a Believer. There was no fruit; I hadn't endeavored to be different than the world

but rather to be as much like the world as possible. I never considered my life in relation to the Lord. No one would ever have guessed my claim of Christianity unless I had told them; and I hardly ever did. I doubt they would have believed me anyway.

In my despair I realized that while I knew who Christ was, I had never sincerely repented of my sins nor had any serious intention of following His ways. I had merely tried to disguise those sins with a thin covering of mouthed words but did nothing to back it up. I took salvation for granted; something cheaply gained therefore only lightly valued. I prayed the prayer of forgiveness to relieve some guilt for awhile, giving me a false sense of security, and then just continued on as before. While I cannot be 100% certain, as I reflect I do not think I was saved. I had lived a self-deception for most of my life, but God could not have been fooled. Yet out of the ashes came a different person, a restored person, who learned that repentance is action, not cold words. Repentance is real, actual, visible change. The proof of repentance lies in a commitment not to repeat the same offenses. Peter learned that; John Chrysostom must have as well. And so did I. It is my earnest hope that you will too, and not have to experience disaster before you do.

But getting back to our passage, let's think about what it was that so worried those religious Jews that they yelled out to Peter, "What should we do?" They had accepted some level of culpability for the death of Yeshua; but at the same time every one knew that they hadn't personally killed Yeshua, nor necessarily even called for his death. Even so the Torah and the Altar offer no possibility of atonement for murder, or for those in the conspiracy to murder, or for those that offer false testimony against an innocent who is then convicted of a capital crime and put to death. The Law offers no atonement for blasphemy against God (and what could be more blasphemous than to reject, let alone conspire to kill, God's Son?) One could repentant, even change and be entirely and sincerely sorry; but no atonement was available in the Levitical sacrificial system for what the English Bible often labels as intentional or high-handed sins. Thus their guilt and separation from God clung to them like a stain; it could not be removed at any price. But Peter offered them a way out.

Notice in verse 38 Peter says: "...and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah **into forgiveness of your sins**....." The insolvable was solved **if** the name of Yeshua was invoked. Peter's instruction telling them to be immersed (baptized) was to (as David Stern says it): "...absorb completely and

accept totally the work, power, authority and person of Yeshua the Messiah". If one does this then forgiveness of sins occurs (even for sins that up until now were not forgivable by any means offered by the Torah Law). 3000 people rushed to accept what Peter offered them that day and they were immersed into the name and Lordship of Yeshua.

But to whom is this kind of forgiveness available? In verse 39 Peter says: "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for those far away; as many as God may call". Where did Peter get this idea from? Just as with all of his other premises, he got it from Holy Scripture. We discussed last week how the Prophet Isaiah, especially chapters 2, 55 and 56, greatly influenced Peter's theology. But here Peter paraphrases Genesis 28:13 & 14. This is a story of Jacob, before God renamed him Israel.

**Genesis 28:13-14 CJB <sup>13</sup> Then suddenly ADONAI was standing there next to him; and he said, "I am ADONAI, the God of Avraham your [grand]father and the God of Yitz'chak. The land on which you are lying I will give to you and to your descendants. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will be as numerous as the grains of dust on the earth. You will expand to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. By you and your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed.**

Abraham had many years earlier been promised that the covenant God made with him would be passed down to his descendants. Jacob was the recipient of that promise, and now it would flow onward from him.

Peter says: "...for the PROMISE is for you..." For the Jewish people "the promise" was a well understood buzzword that meant the covenant God had made with Abraham. For indeed this covenant was a promise; it put no conditions upon Abraham it only made guarantees to Abraham. Peter, as does God's promise to Abraham, says this promise is for your children (descendants) as well, but also for those far away. Who are those who are far away? It is common in Christianity to say that this is referring to gentiles and then use Isaiah 57:19 as the proof text. However as I've demonstrated to you over the years, you can't just willy-nilly lift verses, or portions of a verse, from the Scriptures and use them to validate pre-determined agendas. Indeed there is no doubt from many other verses in the OT (such as we found in Isaiah 56) about foreigners being able to join the God of Israel, and from several more in the NT that under certain conditions gentiles can be partakers in Israel's blessings and promises given

through Israel's covenants with Yehoveh. However I don't think that is at all what Peter had in mind here. For one reason, it would not be until a later time that God would deal with Peter in a dream-vision (where the Lord lowered a cloth filled with unclean animals and told Peter to choose and eat) that Peter finally understood that gentiles were to be actively included into the body of Messiah; something he was reluctant to accept.

The verse in Isaiah 57 that Christianity nearly universally says is what Peter was quoting, and it is speaking about the inclusion of gentiles, is this: <sup>19</sup> ***I will create the right words: 'Shalom shalom to those far off and to those nearby!' says ADONAI; 'I will heal them!'***" So the doctrinal idea is that those who are far off in this passage, and thus those who Peter is speaking about, are gentiles. Jews are near, gentiles are far off. I don't accept that interpretation, especially when one reads this verse in context.

**CJB Isaiah 57:1 *The righteous person perishes, and nobody gives it a thought. Godly men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous person is taken away from the evil yet to come.* <sup>2</sup> *Yes, those who live uprightly will have peace as they rest on their couches.* <sup>3</sup> *"But you, you witches' children, come here, you spawn of adulterers and whores!***

Then moving down towards the end of this chapter we read:

**Isaiah 57:16-19 CJB <sup>16</sup> *For I will not fight them forever or always nurse my anger; otherwise their spirits would faint before me, the creatures I myself have made.* <sup>17</sup> *It was because of their flagrant greed that I was angry and struck them; I hid myself and was angry, but they continued on their own rebellious way.* <sup>18</sup> *I have seen their ways, and I will heal them; I will lead them and give comfort to them and to those who mourn for them-* <sup>19</sup> *I will create the right words: 'Shalom shalom to those far off and to those nearby!' says ADONAI; 'I will heal them!'***"

This is an obvious reference to Israel's exiles. God is speaking about Israel (those who rebelled). Gentiles aren't rebels because they never were part of His chosen people and the God of Israel was not their god. Those who are near are those Jews who live in the Holy Land. Those who are far off are the Hebrew exiles and the Diaspora scattered about the Roman Empire and beyond. This includes the House of Judah and the 10 tribes of the House of Ephraim/Israel. So when Peter spoke of those far off it was the Diaspora Jews and the 10 tribes who

had yet to return. Peter's entire attention was focused on the 12 tribes of Israel, and no one else.....yet.

Verse 42 then moves beyond the day of Pentecost to what occurred afterwards. And in this verse is yet another premise that Christians use to establish a dubious doctrine. Here we read: "They continued faithfully in the teaching of the emissaries, in fellowship, in breaking bread and in the prayers." This verse is pretty straightforward so what I'll focus on is the reference to the breaking of bread. Beginning with the early Roman Church most of Christianity from that time forward says that breaking bread is referring to what is today known as Communion; but it decidedly is **not** about Communion.

Within Judaism then, as now, the breaking of bread stands for the blessing over what is the basic food staple at most tables, bread. And the symbolism is that God sustains life with this provision of sustenance. In the Talmudic tractate ***Berakoth*** (which means benedictions) we find this rather standard understanding of the breaking of bread by the host of the meal:

***"The host breaks bread and the guest says grace after the meal. The host breaks bread so that he should do so generously, and the guest says grace so that he should bless the host. The guests may not eat anything until the one who breaks the bread has tasted. The one who has broken bread stretches out his hand first, but if he wishes to show respect to his teacher or to anyone senior to himself he may do so. The one who acts as host may not break bread until the guests have finished responding Amen."***

Before the host breaks the bread a blessing is pronounced (which is why the guests must say Amen), and then afterward the host breaks the bread. I say again: breaking bread has no reference or connection to the gentile Roman Christian sacrament of Communion. The breaking of bread was in ancient times, in Peter's time, and remains to this day a common Jewish mealtime ritual tradition. All Peter was getting at was that the Believers ate meals together and did so in the standard and customary Jewish way. Thus while Christianity tries to show Peter moving away from his Jewishness by breaking bread, the meaning is the exact opposite. In fact in verse 46 the matter is further clarified.

**Acts 2:46 CJB <sup>46</sup> *Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart.....***



Notice this as well: the disciples continued to meet in the Temple courts every day. F.F. Bruce in his New International Commentary on the Book of Acts says this about what this verse tells us: “The Apostles continued to live as observant Jews”. That sums it up about as well as it can be.

Let's move on to Acts Chapter 3.

### **READ ACTS CHAPTER 3 all**

In the previous chapter, verse 43 says that after Pentecost many miracles and signs took place through the Disciples. Here in chapter 3 we see one of those miracles played out.

Verse 1 opens with Peter and John making their customary daily journey to the Temple. As good observant Jews, they are going at the time of afternoon prayer variously described in different English Bibles as occurring at the ninth hour or 3 in the afternoon (it's the same thing). The Hebrews had, since their time of exile in Babylon and the creation of the Synagogue system, prayed 3 times per day. The morning prayer was called **Shacharit**, the afternoon prayer **Minchah**; and the evening prayer **Ma'ariv**.

Where did the concept of praying 3 times a day as the proper number of times come from? From the Prophet Daniel while he was a Babylonian captive.

**Daniel 6:11 CJB11** *On learning that the document had been signed, Daniel went home. The windows of his upstairs room were open in the direction of Yerushalayim; and there he kneeled down three times a day and prayed, giving thanks before his God, just as he had been doing before.*

Thus from this single verse, upon the earliest beginnings of the Synagogue system up in Babylon, the religious Jews face all Synagogues in the direction of Jerusalem and they pray 3 times per day.

One of the several reasons that Jews might go to the Temple was to be present at the twice daily Altar sacrifices. These particular sacrifices occurred in the morning and evening. Called the **tamid** sacrifices (meaning regular or daily) the Priests performed these 7 days per week, rain or shine, on behalf of all Israel. What should be noticed is that while the Torah prescribes a certain number of sacrificial offerings each day for all Israel, it does NOT prescribe a certain

number of daily prayers. Rather the 3 times per day prayer protocol was part of the liturgy that had been developed in the Synagogue system but was at some point adopted by the Temple authorities. The reason I even mention this is to remind us all that the Synagogue system was a manmade system created in response to predicament of the Babylonian exile. At that time the Temple was destroyed, the Priesthood defunct, and most Jews were sent away out of the Holy Land and to Babylon. Thus there was no means to observe the Torah required purity rituals, or to atone for sins by means of Altar sacrifices. There was no one to teach the Torah, no authority to enforce it, and no place for worship or teaching to occur. Therefore the Synagogue evolved as a means to have an alternative religious structure. The Synagogue would develop new teachers of God's Word, and to be a place for Jews to worship apart from the pagan worship centers of Babylon, and to simply meet and have fellowship. These are all good and worthy things.

The problem arose when alternative means for atonement were invented and declared by the Synagogue authorities. This was in no way authorized by God or His Torah. Prayer and Torah study were said to be the new means of atonement for sins (even though the Scriptures allow no alternative). New rituals and liturgy were developed, and a religious leadership that was not organized or manned by Levitical Priests was formed. The troublesome issue is that once the Jews were freed from their captivity, the Temple was rebuilt and the Priesthood reorganized, the Altar sacrifices were resumed and everything at the Temple in Jerusalem was again functioning as it should, the Synagogue system was not disbanded. Rather the Jews now had two different religious authority systems that functioned separately. Some commentators have tried to describe the two systems as being complimentary and thus all was well. But all one has to do is read a bit of Jewish history, or even the New Testament, to see that the Temple and the Synagogue systems were in many ways competitors if not antagonists. So as often happens, compromises were made for the sake of peace or to make the people more comfortable. The 3 times per day prayer at the Temple was one of these many compromises.

Luke's story of a miracle healing begins as Peter and John are at the Temple and a crippled man is carried in by his friends to what was no doubt his usual begging station, which was at the Beautiful Gate. We are told that he was born crippled meaning he suffered some sort of congenital birth defect. Where is the Beautiful Gate? A Hebrew word for beautiful is **yafeh**; when you English-ize **yafeh** you get Jaffa. So some have tried to say that the Jaffa gate in

Jerusalem is the Beautiful Gate of our story. I've taken many of you through that gate and I'm sorry to inform you that this is not the gate that our crippled man was laying at. For one reason the Jaffa gate came much later. For another it is nowhere near the Temple grounds. Likely the **Yafeh** Gate (the Beautiful Gate) is what is also known in the Mishnah as the Nicanor Gate, the Bronze Gate, and also as the Corinthian Gate. It was located near the Court of the Women on the Temple grounds. Its nickname, the Beautiful Gate, came because of its special magnificence. Josephus tells us that it was made of ornate bronze, inlaid with gold and silver and was the most spectacular of the several gates on the Temple grounds.

Begging was fully condoned and even licensed in this day. Laziness was not tolerated and neither was faking a disability, hence the licensing. In fact giving alms to beggars was considered to be an important part of Judaism. Let's remember that there was no government welfare or disability payment system. Charity was the only way the sick and lame could survive if they were from poor families. The Torah law was clear that the less fortunate were to be cared for otherwise they could cry out to God and the guilt would be placed upon those who refused to help them.

This story of the crippled man that John and Peter encounter is laden with information that I don't want us to hurry through. So we'll conclude for now and take up this story next time.